

Conduit

by MarvelMatt

Category: Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.

Genre: Adventure, Friendship

Language: English

Characters: G. Ward, Jiaying, P. Coulson, Skye/Daisy

Pairings: G. Ward/Skye/Daisy

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-10 19:17:53

Updated: 2016-04-15 21:29:14

Packaged: 2016-04-27 19:24:32

Rating: T

Chapters: 2

Words: 7,552

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: [1st in the Agent Conduit Series] When fifteen year old Grant Ward accepted a lift from a man he barely knew, there was no way he could know just how much his life would change as a result. Fifteen years later, SHIELD specialist Grant Ward is reassigned to Team 616, where he must hide what he is from his new team, but suspicions beg them to ask - just where do his loyalties lie?

## 1. Reassigned

**\*\*Chapter One - Reassigned\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><em>"<em>\_This is Control. We've got confirmed Rising Tide in the area"\_

"Acknowledged"

\_"\_\_Command wants us to order you to pull out"\_

"Ignore them. We need to get it secured, and I'll be fine"

\_"\_\_It's a complication"\_

"Yeah well, if the job was easy-"

\_"\_\_-it wouldn't be any fun. Your extraction's on route"\_

Puffing out a breath as he cut power to the engine of the motorbike he'd 'borrowed' from where the owner had left it unattended, outside of a bar several blocks away, Level Six SHIELD Specialist Grant Ward slid off the seat and tightened the cuffs of his leather gloves.

Wordlessly, he slipped inside his target destination, using his training to blend into the background, ignoring the idle chatter of the patrons, as he made his way towards the upper floor of the building, before wordlessly slipping inside the apartment and making a beeline for where he knew the safe was hidden.

Bypassing the safe's security was easy enough, and it took him even less time to identify the mission's target.

It was going as smooth as a job could go, until the interception team showed up at his door.

\_Well\_, he supposed, \_at least he had broken in first this time\_.

They wasted no time in attacking first, working as a team in tandem, pushing him backwards and away from the safe, towards the kitchen, where they were hoping to corner him.

Their mistake.

\_ "\_\_Agent Ward, this is Control. Come in" \_

He ducked under a high kick from the opponent on his right, before the second caught him with a punch to the chest. The attack didn't hurt, but it did damage his pride.

If the two idiots that had been sent to stop him managed to even land a blow, then he was either getting too overconfident or too sloppy.

\_Or,\_ he growled internally, \_too much of both.\_

Using his advantages in both speed and power, it would be too easy for him to take out both men, he wanted to use his head, now it was now a matter of pride.

\_ "\_\_Agent Ward, report" \_

His left hand grabbed the frying pan from the side, before using it to block another attempt at a high kick by colliding with his knee, his attacker staggering back in pain, before collapsing as Ward used the moment of his partner's hesitation to snap his own leg out in a low kick.

The force shattering his opponent's kneecap, he dropped to the floor completely, passing out from the sudden influx of pain to his system.

The second man froze at the sight of his now unconscious partner, and before he could regain his senses, the same frying pan connected with the back of his head and Ward's knee connected with his nose and forehead.

He was unconscious before he hit the ground.

\_ "\_\_Agent Ward. This is command. Report in NOW!" \_

Blowing out his frustration, he reached up to tap his earpiece,

smacking himself in the side of the face and bringing himself back online, "This is Ward"

"\_\_Agent Ward\_\_", he could hear the disappointment bleeding through his earpiece on just those two words, "\_\_respond quicker next time. We may have enemy combatants in the area. Be aware"\_\_

"\_Really?\_" He dragged the word out, letting his sarcasm bleed back through his earpiece, "I hadn't noticed", attempting to curb his temper, he added, "package secured"

"\_Your extraction will be on the roof. Thirty seconds out"\_\_

"Acknowledged. Ward out"

\* \* \*

><p>Sitting across from Maria Hill, who was looking at him, while seeming unimpressed, irritated and bored at the same time, was definitely not a highly regarded item on his places-I-want-to-be list.<p>

"What does SHIELD stand for Agent Ward?"

Hill's tone was just like her personality, no nonsense, strictly business all of the time. She was, he had to acknowledge, the very definition of a consummate professional.

"The Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division"

She leant back in her chair, seeming to relax slightly, "And just what does that mean?"

"That somebody \_really\_ wanted our initials to spell 'SHIELD'"

She shot him a dry look, which indicated that her irritation was beginning to grow back, and quickly, so he pushed forwards with his answer, "It \_means\_, that we're the line", he was glad to see her relax again slightly, "between the world and the much weirder world, so that things-"

He reached inside his jacket pocket to pull out the package he'd secured yesterday in Paris, before sliding it straight across the table, straight into her waiting hand, and then pulling the cuffs of his gloves tight once again.

"-like this Chitauri neuro-link show up, we can contain them properly and keep them away from the general civilian population"

Seemingly ignoring him as he continued speaking, Hill took a moment to examine the device, before slipping it in to her pocket.

"I'm here to tell you that you've been reassigned"

She watched as several emotions flashed across his face, disbelief and confusion being the most prominent, "Erm â€¦ I'm sorry Commander?"

"Agent Coulson has requisitioned a mobile command unit to which you are assigned"

"Agent Coulson died during the Battle of New York", before she could interject, he felt the need to remind her, "not only did I read the report, but I was there"

"You actually read the report?"

"I do have access. I am Level Six"

"Welcome to Level Seven"

He turned from where he was sitting, ignoring the annoyed look on Hill's face and found himself face to face with a dead man, who was offering him a small grin, amusement dancing behind his eyes.

"Sorry", his face said he wasn't, "it was dark and I couldn't resist. I think there's a bulb out"

Phil Coulson was alive.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>One Year Earlier<br>SHIELD Helicarrier  
>Skies above New York City<strong>

"What's the situation!?"

No response.

"Anyone!?"

There was another lurch as the Helicarrier shook in mid-air, and then his comms unit fizzled to life in his ear, a slightly panicked voice filling it a moment later.

"Ward! Is that you?"

"Yes ma'am. What the hell is-"

"It's The Hulk", Hill's voice quivered slightly at the end "for the first time in his life, he can hear actual fear in her voice, "Loki's men are here. The Hulk's gone berserk on the lower levels. Thor and Romanoff are trying to contain him. Rogers and Stark are attempting to fix the engines before we fall out the sky"

"And Clint?"

"Agent Barton is the one leading Loki's forces. We've got reports coming in saying he's making his way towards the detention level. Ward "Loki's down there " Coulson's on his way to the cell. They took out our cameras, and we can't let-"

"I'm already moving to intercept"

Sprinting, he ran straight past the main elevator and straight for the nearest emergency hatch. Dropping six levels down a ladder would be much quicker. He didn't even have time to waste twisting open the

door handles.

Making sure the corridor was clear of other agents as he ran â€" Hill had said the security cameras were disabled during the initial attack â€" he swiped at some of the loose smoke that had filtered up from where the engines where, letting it dance around his wrist as his body absorbed it, let himself loose.

His own powers frightened him at times, especially with what it was he could do, so he attempted to never use them unless it became absolutely necessary, but right now Clint needed his help, and he was damn well getting it.

Shifting his body into smoke always made his breath hitch, just before he dashed straight into the hatch's bulkhead door.

And then moved straight through it, the smoke moving through the gaps at the door's frame.

Reappearing on the other side, he returned to the flesh, before dropping down the security shaft as gravity took hold of him.

Using his training, he held in the shiver of thrill and fear that crept up his spine as he grabbed hold of the sides of the ladder to slow himself down, counting the levels as he dropped. The moment he saw the 'D' stamped on the wall, he wasted no time smoke-dashing through the level's bulkhead door and dropping into a combat stance.

He moved onto the walkway, one of only two ways to get to Loki's cell â€" Coulson should've taken the second one â€" and then peeling off his gloves, he threw them into his back pocket and waited.

He didn't have to wait long.

The Avenger strode onto the walkway, and he stepped forward to meet him in the middle, his hands up in a defensive pose.

"Clint-"

He was cut off by a fist to his stomach.

It seemed that talking wasn't going to do him any good.

The two men exchanged blows, their fists colliding in mid-air, their training on full display as they blocked each other's strikes, their movements well placed, as they were able to match each other perfectly, their knowledge of the other's fighting abilities giving no man an advantage.

A glancing palm strike to his chest caught him by surprise, but it was enough to push him backwards, and towards the detention room â€" and Loki's cell.

It also gave Hawkeye enough room to fire off an arrow.

He attempted to dash in smoke form again, but he hadn't managed to move when the arrow connected.

He was half-way towards becoming smoke when it struck, pain coursed

through him from his shoulder, but it didn't blow out the way it was supposed to as the arrow moved through him, however the force was enough to knock him even further backwards, right up to the steps, and then, failing to regain his balance, he fell.

His advanced healing helped him shake off the feeling of haziness as he righted himself on the floor, as he attempted to spring back to his feet, before he saw the arrow aimed squarely between his eyes.

Without thinking, he slammed his left hand to the ground and flipped the switch on his powers. He felt the steel grating under his fingertips and then it travelled up his arm.

His body's cells morphed to match the material, the soft cells of his skin swapping to mimic the stronger, much more durable steel.

The arrow bounced harmlessly off his forehead, falling to the floor, and sparking at the point of contact between his eyes.

\_That would've been a kill shot.\_

He darted back up the stairs, ignoring the arrows that were now being fired at him, hearing them clatter to the floor as their momentum abruptly died off against his skin.

He swatted several more aside with his hands before the vents above them caved slightly, drawing their attention away from their fight. Using the distraction, he lashed out, his steel fist breaking the bow cleanly through the middle.

Barton's blank features registered surprise at the loss of his primary weapon before his partner dropped from the now damaged vent, landing in a crouch behind him.

Deciding she was the bigger threat, Hawkeye threw himself against the Black Widow in a futile attempt at hand to hand combat. She swiped his initial jabs off to the side with her elbows, before throwing all of her weight into a knee that connected with his stomach, and caused all of the air to rush from his lungs.

Ward threw his hands up, palms facing towards the two of them and Widow used the advantage to slam Barton's head against them.

The steel did its job and the male Avenger dropped to the ground unconscious.

"We need to get him to a sealed medbay"

She didn't need to tell him twice.

Reverting back to his natural skin, he grabbed the fallen man and hoisted him onto his shoulders, before following the female agent away from the cells and towards the elevator.

\_"\_\_You know how to pilot one of those jets?"\_

\_"\_\_No"\_\_

\_"\_\_I can", sitting up, his hands flew to his head as a rush of pain

hit him. Nat hadn't been kidding when she said she'd hit him upside the head.\_\_

\_\_"\_\_You got a suit?"\_\_

\_\_"\_\_Yeah"\_\_

\_\_"\_\_Then suit up"\_\_

\* \* \*

><p><em>"<em>\_Quinjet 61652. You are unauthorised for departure. Stand down now"\_\_

"This is Agent Barton, open the hangar bay doors"

\_\_"\_\_Negative Agent Barton. Director's orders. No one in or out. Stand down"\_\_

"Damn it", he cast his eyes over the instrument panel, before turning to his two cohorts, "I can't override the door controls from here"

"Alright then", the Captain locked eyes with the two SHIELD agents, "we need a way to open the doors"

"We can't do that from here", Romanoff's explanation caused him to raise his eyebrows, "it's a security measure. Only the control room can open it, and if it's unauthorised then a security team will flood the room in seconds. Stops at least some of the enemy combatants from escaping", she offered as the super-soldier looked more confused.

"Damn it", he muttered under his breath, "well then we have to-"

He was cut off by the alarm blaring as the hangar doors began sliding open. The amber lights flashed to life, their rotating glow confounding the three Avengers.

\_\_"\_\_Clint, get out of here!"\_\_

Rogers just looked more confused, but Barton lunged for the comms unit, "Grant!?"

\_\_"\_\_Get out of here and go kick that false god's ass! I don't know how long I can hold off the security team for"\_\_

"We're going", his hand flew across the panels, bringing the quinjet up to full power as they flew out the doors and towards the city, "and thanks kid"

\_\_"\_\_Win this one, then come bail me out, and I'll consider us even"\_\_

"I'll even get Stark to buy you a drink. Best whiskey you're ever gonna have"

\_\_A chuckle filtered through, "I'll hold you to that. Good luck"\_\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Present Day<br>The Hub  
>Location Classified<strong>

He dutifully followed Hill and Coulson into one of The Hub's many command centres, before they came to a stop in front of a large screen, which was showing footage of a hooded man falling out of an exploding building, landing on his feet and walking away.

"What was that?"

"That Agent Ward, was an unregistered gifted. We believe that he's a new one as well"

He'd heard these lines before, "You want me to go in and cross him off?"

"What?" Coulson was looking at him as though he were morbid, "No. This man's life just got a whole lot weirder. He needs our help"

"A welcoming committee", he was certain that this was Coulson's idea. Hill obviously thought it was hilarious, but she wouldn't have made him do this, "I'm a specialist. I go in, I get the job done, alone", he stressed the last word, but it was apparent that they weren't listening to him, "disarming a nuclear bomb, I'm your guy, but thisâ€|"

"Your latest marks from Agent Hill are excellent"

He listened as Coulson rattled off his file, completely ignoring him, as well as any objections he had to his new placement, if she hadn't been before then Hill was definitely looking smug now, "Combat, top marks. Hand-eye coordination, off the charts. Espionage, she gave you the best marks since Romanoff, though considering who your SO was, that's hardly surprising"

"Why am I being reassigned?"

Coulson flipped the file open the one of the back pages, rotating it to give him a glimpse of a page that contained a crude drawing he couldn't distinguish, before he pulled the file back towards himself.

"Under people skills, Agent Hill gave you that drawing", he looked contemplative for a moment, "I think it's a little poop, with knives sticking out of it-"

If Coulson expected him to laugh then he was going to be disappointed, he ignored his Commander muttering about porcupines as Coulson rolled on.

"-My point is that my team needs a specialist, and I think, that maybe, just maybe, that you're the perfect man for the job"

And it didn't look like he was going to be getting out of this.

\* \* \*

><p>"I've checked out the files on your new team. There's no one there that warrants you wearing your gloves all of the time.



Fieldwork only should suffice, so you can relax in that department"<p>

He nodded as he and Hill walked alongside each other in the corridor, heading towards the apartments section of The Hub. He needed to pack his bags and she needed to speak to him outside of the confines of a recorded session in a briefing room, "Are any of them-

"None of them will be made aware of your \_particular\_ skillset, it is, and remains, classified Level Nine Intel. Agent Coulson is your team leader, you will be serving as his second-in-command, and both of you will remain, for now at least, at Levels Eight and Seven respectively, Congratulations by the way on the promotion, it is well deserved"

He nodded again, "Thank you. What are my orders regarding my skillset. I'm going to be spending nearly all of my time on this plane for the foreseeable future, and I do occasionally have to use \_it\_ when I'm out in the field"

"I know that Grant, and Director Fury is also aware of this", they reached his door, and paused, making themselves face each other, "and while we couldn't deny Coulson's request at having you as his team's Specialist, we would prefer that your \_skills\_ stay under the radar, however, if it should become unavoidableâ€|", she trailed off, the implication clear.

Keep it hidden unless absolutely necessary.

\* \* \*

><p>Hill forwarded him a copy of the Level Seven files for each of his new teammates. They were pretty barren, and made for dull reading, but he made a point of memorising them anyway. Two of them were too young to have anything of actual note in their files, and the other two had quite a large portion of their files redacted, citing a higher clearance level needed, but at least he now had faces and names for when he met them tomorrow.<p>

**\*\*Phillip Coulson\*\***

><em>Level Eight. Team 616 leader. Field agent, specialising in hostage negotiation and first contact situations. Fifty-one years old. Responsible for the bringing together of The Avengers. 'Died' during the 'Battle of New York', now returning to field work. Solid marksman and average combat skills.<em>

**\*\*Melinda May\*\***

><em>Level Seven. Team 616 pilot. Forty-nine years old. Former field agent trained as a weapon's specialist, and formerly partnered to Phil Coulson, now serving in administration due to 'personal reasons', after the events of a mission in Bahrain, the same mission in which she earned the moniker 'The Cavalry'. Formerly an above average marksman and combatant â€" current ability unknown due to having left fieldwork several years ago. Agent May has agreed to pilot the aircraft, but not to re-enter the field as a combat specialist.<em>

**\*\*Leopold Fitz & Jemma Simmons**

><strong>\_Both Fitz and Simmons have individual files, but are listed together often enough for management to warrant giving them a

combined file. A team since their early days at SHIELD's Sci-Ops Academy, \_\_\*\*FitzSimmons,\*\*\_\_ as they are called, are considered to be a single unit. One is an engineer and the other a biochemist, however I am unsure as to which is which. Both are twenty five years old. Neither one has been into the field before. \_\_\*\*NOTE - \*\*\_\_FitzSimmons are \_\_\*\*NOT\*\*\_\_ cleared for combat.\_\_

Unconsciously he tightened the cuffs of his gloves again, before scowling as he re-read the information. He was working with two agents "admittedly legends in their own right" but two agents that were also past their prime, one of which was refusing fieldwork, and then he had two kids that he just knew he was going to be made to look after, that weren't even cleared for combat.

Why in the hell of it where they going to be in the field if they weren't cleared for combat!?

A firefight was almost a certainty.

And they wanted his powers to \_remain hidden\_?

\_Coulson's insane.\_

Resisting the urge to pull his own hair out, he snapped shut the notebook he'd been flipping through, and tossed it on top of the duffel bag he'd packed ahead of his moving to the plane he'd be living in from the morning onwards.

He'd already returned his apartment's entry card "there was no use paying for something he no longer needed. Then he'd stored all of his possessions into his only bag. All he needed to do now was leave first thing in the morning.

Maybe the team would surprise him.

\* \* \*

><p>They didn't.<p>

Fitz and Simmons finished each other's thoughts sentences, they were (in a word he'd never say aloud) "adorable" like two little puppies, where the most painful thing they'd experienced in their lives was a brief tap on the nose with a newspaper.

Their first real firefight they ran into was going to rattle them completely, and after meeting them, he wasn't sure they'd be able to handle it.

May was exactly what he expected. Cold, blunt to a point of being callous, calculating, and despite her age, she was \_extremely\_ attractive. She could've easily passed herself off as someone who was fifteen years younger.

Looking at her, he could see the legend she was, but he could also see the ghosts of what had happened in Bahrain etched deeply under her skin, her own demons just lurking there. Pain that hid just beneath the surface of her skin, hiding behind steel eyes, just waiting for her to unleash them on the world.

God help whoever was foolish enough to stand in her way on that

day.

And Coulson?

He'd met children that seemed less naïve than him.

Okay that wasn't completely fair. He'd read through Coulson's file, and he was definitely someone he could see himself enjoying working for. Hill's personal notes had him pegged as a by-the-book SHIELD agent, and a resounding company man through and through.

He had apparently also worked with Barton in the past and had overseen Romanoff when she was recruited to SHIELD in the beginning, so he thought they'd at least be able hold a conversation over that if nothing else.

Half an hour after walking onto The Bus for the first time, his mind is set on one thing.

Hill needs a new set of notes.

\* \* \*

><p>They track the IP address used by the member of the Rising Tide responsible for uploading the videos of their gifted onto the internet. Coulson drives the SUV, leaving his beloved Lola behind (and just why did he feel the need to bring a collectible car - with a name - on a long-term mission?), and leading the two of them straight for the source's current location.<p>

Coulson tells him an anecdote about a woman walking a dog that seems pointless, but when he catches the man sporting an amused half-smile while shaking his head at him, he realises his mistake.

It was supposed to be a joke.

He still doesn't get it.

Why does the man insist on making them (cracking them?) while they're supposed to be working?

They track the source to a single van parked up in an alley, and they waste no time in pulling open the door, and looking every bit the agents the Rising Tide have been describing, they find their mystery hacker mid-broadcast, she makes a half-assed snarky remark at them, and he wastes no time in throwing the black hood he has over her head.

But not before he takes in what she looks like.

She's stunning.

Completely and utterly breathtakingly beautiful.

But that's not what captures his attention.

It's not the way her hair shines ever so slightly in the sunlight, nor is it the look of innocence that she flashes them when they appear in front of her out of nowhere.

It's definitely not a certain part of her upper anatomy that he fights to resist glancing at.

It's her eyes.

The two of them lock eyes for barely a second before the bag covers them, but he would recognise those exact shape and colour eyes anywhere.

The eyes he first saw on one of the worst days of his life.

They're eyes that remind him of home.

They're the eyes of the woman that saved him.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Authors Note<strong>

Big shout out to **\*\*Freddyfirmelmst\*\*** for help with the premise.

So this is the first chapter of a new work (and series), which combines Agents of SHIELD with elements inspired from inFAMOUS: Second Son.

Please leave me a review below, and let me know what you think - it'll only take a minute and I'll feel much better for it.

And as always, please feel free to message me about anything - I always reply and enjoy speaking with you all.

-MarvelMatt

## 2. Soldier Boy

**\*\*Chapter Two " Soldier Boy\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Fifteen Years Ago<br>Plymouth Military Academy for Boys

>Plymouth, Massachusetts<strong>

Sergeant Blake Murphy prided himself on his ability to instil, not only a high level of discipline, but also a sense of fraternity and comradery amongst his charges.

Each of the days' exercises changed daily, but they the same as they always had been, and as far as he was concerned, they always would be. Today was Tuesday, which for his boys, meant that after their 0600 wake up call, they all had thirty minutes to get showered (cold water only of course), shaved (those who actually needed to), dressed into their uniforms for morning inspection, and then they had another half hour to have their breakfast in the mess.

Sitting at his place on the staff table, he looked on as his cadets all filed in, some of them chatting animatedly, discussing their day compared to what some of the other platoons were going to be doing. His platoon (the Fifth Platoon), were particularly excitable over

their breakfast.

For today was a Tuesday.

And Tuesdays meant they had the day to spend on the range.

Even he enjoyed those days more than the others.

He was an ex-marine, who was notably distinguished for his sharpshooter skills, and he loved taking his cadets " all twenty-two of them " out and onto the Academy's shooting range, where he could attempt to pass on his skills to the next generation of his country's protectors.

Most of his boys were shaping up to be pretty decent marksmen in the years to come, but one of them already stood head and shoulders above the rest.

Cadet Grant Douglas Ward.

The boy had been dropped off by his parents four months ago, arriving in the middle of the night, all smiles at the front gate, before becoming upset as they'd spoken with the staff in private.

The boy was nothing but trouble " a real hell-raiser. He'd been caught apparently trying to drown his own younger brother in an old well the family had at the bottom of their (presumably rather large) garden. They didn't want to send one of their own sons to prison, and felt that they were out of options.

Military school was their last chance, and they'd all only been too happy to help out one of the state's most illustrious families. The Wards, after all, were a political and social juggernaut, and by far one of the most influential families in Massachusetts, and they even had a notable presence on the national stage.

Basically, even if you wanted to, you didn't refuse them anything.

\_Anything.\_

They'd signed the paperwork, exchanged a few pleasant words about the school's funding and then the parents departed back for Boston, but not before obtaining a guarantee from them that the boy wouldn't be treated any differently, just because he was their son.

The two of them moved away from the PMA staff, thanking them once again, before they crossed the distance to their car, sliding into the backseat, and waving goodbye to their third child as their driver pulled off of the premises and away into the night.

Every member of staff noted the boy's completely apathetic response to his parent's departure. He just didn't react. His tall, yet skinny frame was taught, wound tightly like a coil looking ready to snap. Their quartermaster, Mr Rollins, took him by the shoulder, steering him towards the stores, getting the boy kitted out while they sorted his placement.

He'd be sorted into his platoon first thing in the morning.

Hopefully the boy wouldn't be too much trouble.

\* \* \*

><p>Too much trouble?<p>

He couldn't believe that's what his first thoughts had been towards the boy.

The boy was what the very definition of a natural soldier should be.

When he'd agreed to take him into his platoon, Blake honestly thought that he'd have to spend weeks getting the boy into the right state of mind, breaking him into the right attitude. Politicians weren't soldiers. They didn't know how to fight, how to bleed and sweat, how to die, so why should their children?

But the boy was like a sponge.

His first morning there, he looked just as impeccable as he expected all of his cadets to be. The boy ate how he was expected to, taking the last space at the back, he expected to see him whine about his position, or the fact that he had last pick at the food.

But he didn't.

He kept his head down, keeping himself to himself, and got on with whatever the day's tasks where. He ran the obstacle courses like he'd been running them for years. His cleaning was up-to-standard, his uniforms were always clean and pressed, and his boots were shined highly enough to see his reflection staring back at him.

But while he, and the other staff decided to keep their opinions to themselves, they were impressed by his constant ability to look like a third year trained cadet instead of a new recruit, but it was at the shooting range that he finally got a feel for just how good the boy could be - if he was trained right.

All recruits started off using a basic recurve bow before they were allowed to move onto the handguns, rifles and shotguns. He'd shown him the proper way to stand, how to aim, the proper breathing technique, and then they'd had a quick safety talk before leaving him under the supervision of Hank, their new quartermaster " he'd shown up two days after Mr Rollins had left abruptly, citing a new job offer.

That was a stroke of luck if there ever was one.

And when he came back just fifteen minutes later, the centre of the target was littered with arrows.

There were a few in and around the edges of the target, where he'd obviously been trying to get a feel for the weapon, and then all of his shots where inside the seventh, eighth, ninth and centre rings, his groupings getting tighter the longer he practiced - the boy was a prodigy!

"Kid, your hand-eye coordination is off the charts! You should be

learning how to use a fucking sniper rifle!"

"Language, Mr Daughtry"

Both the quartermaster and the young Ward whipped around to find the Sergeant walking back towards them. Nervous at the sight of the new arrival, Daughtry's hand went instinctually to the back of his bald head, as he rubbed anxious circles, "Hank's fine, Sergeant Murphy. No need to be so formal with me"

"Hank", the word came out jerkily from a man unused to using causal terms with his peers, "Are they allâ€¦", he trailed off, nodding towards the target, unsure on how to phrase his question, but was saved by the interjection of their new quartermaster.

"Every single one's been fired off by the kid. I mean â€¦ I say you should give him something bigger"

Admittedly, for a civilian, that was a good idea.

So over the next several hours of the day, Murphy left Hank and a few of his more experienced and trusted cadets in charge of supervising the group while he took the kid through the handgun, using the 9mm Browning as the training weapon.

Within fifteen minutes the boy could name every part of the weapon, within another fifteen he could strip it and put it back together with only minor corrections being needed.

By the end of the first hour, he was firing down the range like he was an experienced cadet. By the end of the second, he looked like he was an actual marksman.

Feeling curious, he moved the boy onto the .22 target rifle.

And it was the same result.

Five minutes to clean the bolt and chamber, and another five to remove and replace it with the sling. Another half hour, and his shooting skills were better than every other cadet in his platoon.

The assault rifle took longer because of its much more advanced set-up, but by the end of their second hour there, the results were the same, a small amount of practice turned the boy into a marksman.

The 12 gauge shotgun was child's play for him, and pretty soon the floor was littered in clay pieces.

He couldn't wait to put the boy's name down as his lead marksman for the year's training day competition.

\* \* \*

><p>Cadet Ward was also now the tallest member in his platoon, so he found himself marching at the front of the squad, leading by example as they marched towards the range.<p>

He'd been there a while now, and the staff had all noted how he

didn't have any friends.

While the others made connections, mostly as an attempt to replace the feelings they had for the siblings and friends they'd left back home, the boy just didn't want to. They'd seen him at sports nights and during their down time, but he never even made an attempt to go near them, he just kept away from everybody and read whatever books he managed to get his hands on. Someone (he was pretty sure it was Corporal Ryder "their resident military fiction geek") kept lending him books, and he seemed to have read every single one of them so far, because he just kept getting more and more.

They spent their day on the range, as he looked on, watching how some of the younger and newer cadets idolised the boy, watching in awe as he stepped up to the shooting mats, handgun aimed squarely down the range, emptying the entire mag into the target's centre in under ten seconds before stepping back.

He might not want friends, but whether he liked it or not, he had admirers.

It was the same no matter the activity. If they were cleaning he'd take the hardest jobs to save the younger ones the trouble. When they went hiking, he always had extra water and rations for the ones who'd forgotten. When they spent Tuesday afternoons in the gym for physical training, he always went last, letting the others rest while he ran it when Coach Griffith was at his most irritable.

With half the stuff he did, he wouldn't be surprised if there was an official fan club somewhere.

It was on their way back that Hank called Ward away.

For the first time since the boy had arrived, there was a phone call from home for him.

\* \* \*

><p>He was numb.<p>

He thought that since he was longer in the way that Christian would leave Thomas alone. Rose was a vindictive, lying and manipulative bitch, he had to acknowledge that much, but she wouldn't (and had never) physically put her hands on Thomas.

And now Thomas was lying on a hospital bed and Rose had been the one to call him, hysterical and half-sobbing as she tried, and failed, to describe what exactly it was that had happened.

Hysteria made for bad conversation.

He hung up the phone with his mind made up.

He had to go back to Boston.

And he had to do it tonight.

\* \* \*

><p>Picking up the second receiver in his office, Hank listened in on



every word the girl spewed out, hiding her amusement at her brother behind mock-anger, and he looked on through the window as the boy's face morphed from his now-standard blank mask of calmness into complete disbelief, then falling in to fear, before burning in anger, and then finally settling completely into resolve, as he bought into what she was selling.<p>

It was a look that Hank himself was familiar with.

It was a look that he found in the mirror whenever he thought \_they\_ were getting close to him.

The boy was gonna make a run for it.

And that was his completely non-suspicious ticket out of here.

He still had a briefcase of the few pods he'd managed to steal stashed under the bed in his quartermaster's cabin. He'd been at the school for too long though, he needed to get moving again, he needed to get back to Emily, and the kid was a great way to get out of there.

He didn't have to wait long for his chance.

All the other cadets were currently in the mess, grabbing their dinner, when he saw the boy emerge from his cabin, his lone pack slung over his shoulder, and dressed in the black tac outfit they all had for night exercises rather than their usual camouflage.

Keeping an eye out for any of the staff or other cadets, the boy wandered out into the carpark, obviously looking to hotwire a car, he was scoping out the vehicles, obviously looking for an older model, one without a car alarm or a tracking device.

It was time to make his move.

Silently, he crossed the carpark, grabbing the boy's shoulder from behind when he came into reach, the kid span around bringing his hands up in a defensive position, a look of fear spreading across his face.

"I've got a truck over here"

The kid assessed him for less than a minute, before nodding curtly, relaxing ever so slightly, and following him before sliding into the passenger's seat of his pick-up.

He didn't speak, and no words were necessary between them. Why they the other was leaving just wasn't any of their business. They were just two people riding together in case they were stopped on their way and they needed an excuse to be there if people got suspicious, which wouldn't surprise either of them â€" the two of them could easily pass off as an uncle and nephew.

He slid his silver briefcase onto the floor next to the boy's legs and was relieved when he didn't say anything. The kid just wanted to get home, and he just wanted to find Emily now that he had a few of the pods.

He could use one the pod in his jacket pocket on her before selling

the rest he had in the briefcase on as potential weapons.

Maintaining their silence, the truck roared to life, and the two of them pulled away and into the late evening air.

\* \* \*

><p>The radio played some old country music that Hank didn't know, his many years spent in prison had hampered his ability to recognise anything that a regular person would view as the norm.<p>

His time spent away from the rest of the world after that hadn't done him any good in that regard either.

The kid didn't even seem to notice that the music was playing.

They were mostly heading towards Boston, where he was going to drop the kid off, when it happened.

They struck.

There was no warning, no signs, so it was obvious that they'd been tracking him for a while, setting up an ambush for him.

A lone gunshot took out one of the tires, sending them spinning out of control and off the side of the road. Their airbags deployed as they were brought to a crashing stop, dazing both men, sending their world into fuzz.

Hank's fingers jumbled inside of his jacket, fumbling for the single pod he'd kept there, and feeling better when his fingers were safely secured around it.

A brief glance to his left told the man that his passenger had exited the vehicle, and was no doubt somewhere on the floor, \_probably throwing up from a concussion\_, he thought grimly.

He could've used the boy's help around now â€" he was one of the top students in his combat class.

\_Between the combat skills and the shooting ability, the kid would be a real fighter when he was older - and really useful right about now.\_

Before he could begin to plan his escape, Hank felt himself being wrenched from his seat through the window, before being thrown to the floor.

"Well boys, looks like we got ourselves a catch"

He recognised \_that\_ voice.

He pushed himself up to his knees and was awarded with three men looming over him. Each wore black military combat trousers and flak jackets, with dark sunglasses to hide their eyes and a scarf that covered their faces below the nose.

"Y'know Al, the way this is going, we'll have him done and dusted by lunch. Then what'll we do?"

"You're right Mick, we should at least have a little fun first"

His fingers grasped the pod tighter.

The car creaked as his back hit the door that was half hanging off the frame, clutching the pod tighter as they rained down on him with their fists, he felt the blood pouring from his mouth and staining his shirt, and then, as suddenly as they had started, they stopped.

He forced his eyes open just enough to see the boy crawl around the corner, bleeding from a gash at the top of his head, no doubt from his head smacking the dashboard.

Now it was his opportunity.

The one who had identified himself as 'Mick', grabbed the boy by his collar, earning him a quiet groan, before throwing him alongside the car door, the boy's head bouncing off the door's mirror, smashing the mirror, and giving him new wounds on his head, he turned a shade paler, he was thirty seconds away from throwing up " for the second time, if the smell was any indication.

Resolved to end this before they killed him, he sent a silent apology to the boy as he slipped his hand out of his jacket. Determined he raised his hand into the air-

"-What's he doing?

"-Stop him!?"

-and smashed the pod against the ground, releasing the mist.

The three men inhaled in instant shock, which proved to be their fatal mistake.

The mist flooded their lungs, mingling with their DNA and searching for the vitals parts necessary for the work to finish, only to be unable to find them.

The stone casing crawled up their bodies, starting at the base of their legs, rapidly inching further and further up their bodies. The three men shared a look of absolute terror as the rock covered the faces before the process was done.

A dull groan turned his attention away from the men he'd killed at towards the boy, his face was flushed with fear as he struggled against the stone that had grew to cover his chest, and the two men locked eyes.

He didn't see the strong young man he'd taken from the Academy.

He saw a boy determined not to scream.

"I'm sorry kid, but a guy's gotta do what a guy's gotta do. It's nothing personal"

And the boy moved no more.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Notes<strong>

And there we have Chapter 2!

Just so you all know, the current plan is to try and intermingle Ward's backstory (and maybe some of the others), by doing full flashback chapters, as opposed to the mid-chapter breaks like in Chapter 1 - but please let me know if you'd prefer it the other way around.

And as always, please leave a review!

-MarvelMatt

End  
file.